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## Original Research Article

Understanding the Meanings Represented in *Ditolobonya* Songs: Basotho Women's Experiences and Realities

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

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## KEYWORDS

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For a very long time, women have been silenced in expressing their feelings and talking about their experiences in their societies dominated by patriarchal ideologies. For this reason, Basotho woman use ditolobonya songs (through pitiki) in an effort to deal with the abuse, ill-treatment and all the hardships they go through in their relationships and marriages. This study is necessitated by the discovery I made while listening to these songs that somehow they portray what Basotho women go through in their lives ranging from issues of love, appreciation of a partner, problems they encounter in their relationships, more especially their marriages, to how they are ill-treated by their in-laws as well as their own husbands. As a result, this triggered me to analyze ditolobonya songs to understand what Basotho women go through and how they express their feelings through these songs. The aim of this study therefore is to investigate the extent to which Basotho women use ditolobonya songs to narrate their life experiences. The present study therefore, is premised qualitatively on an Africana-feminism as its base for theoretical framework. For the purpose of this paper, I use Africana womanism as critiques came up on feminism for failing to address the experiences and realities of Africana women. I purposely selected five songs centered on the focus of my study and analyzed them using content analysis. The findings of the study indicate that Basotho women use ditolobonya songs to narrate the challenges they encounter in their marriages and advise one another.

## Introduction

For a very long time, women have been silenced in expressing their feelings and talking about their experiences in their societies dominated by patriarchal ideologies. For this reason, Basotho woman use *ditolobonya* songs (through *pitiki*- a celebration that follows the birth of a child) in an effort to deal with the abuse, ill-treatment and all the hardships they go through in their relationships and marriages. At this juncture, it is important to understand what ditolobonya is. Khotso (2017) defines ditolobonya as a type of music that is considered valuable to Basotho women as it is 'platform where social messages are communicated' (p.21). It is through *ditolobonya* songs that Basotho women have the opportunity to voice out their social problems, feelings and indicate among others their understanding of masculinity. Songs shed light on social issues; they have remained as part of the oral patrimony and have been sung by females in different celebrations.

Women lament for their position in the society which is equal to that of children in the family, whereby among others they cannot question their husbands as to why they come home or arrive the next morning (Rapeane,

2003). Through ditolobonya songs, Basotho women come together with that independent attitude, becoming self-assertive. One does not see these women going out marching. Rather, they challenge all forms of patriarchal structures inherent in their society. In the same light, Molapo (2005, p. 124) emphasizes that for women to survive the rules and abuse they suffer in the hands of their in-laws, “their relationships with other women and activities outside the walled courtyards of their husbands’ household serve as support mechanisms which could counteract their powerlessness and vulnerability.” They “do not have to shout loudly at all times. They can present their grievances through songs, “(Kwatsha, 2002, p. 12). Finnegan (2012, p. 103) asserts that through songs, female singers confront many aspects of cultural life. The female singing is a strategy for empowerment to contest the structure of social disparity.

Rapeane (2003) is of the opinion that that Basotho, like any African society, impose silence on the disempowered, namely women and girls, as a mechanism to maintain the status quo. For this matter, women and children are treated the same way as subordinates, as it is these two groups that are usually silenced most. It should be noted that, if a woman dares speak when she is being ridiculed by her husband or partner, she is considered to disrespect him. For example, some of the expectations of a Mosotho woman is to never question her husband’s whereabouts. In the light of this, Rapeane (2003, p. 102) argues “both culture and religion have worked closely to bring women down.” This takes me back to what Rapeane (2003) says about women using the very same silence imposed on them as a form of resistance against all forms of oppression. Ironically, the very same silence they have to use as a form of respect, being submissive and obedient becomes a weapon they use when least expected.

From the above discussion, it can be seen how Basotho women use ditolobonya as a weapon to break the silence, to support each other in telling their ‘untold stories’ in which their social structures do not afford them such opportunities to present their cases. It is through the mentioned songs that Basotho women come together, to narrate their experiences, give support to one another and give advice. This paper therefore addresses multidisciplinary concepts and it is important to first establish a clear working theoretical base that I took as it is not possible to cover all of them in a paper of this nature. In what follows, I discuss the theoretical framework guiding this study.

## Theoretical Framework

In this study, I adopt Africana womanism in analyzing ditolobonya songs which focus mainly on the experiences and realities of Basotho women. Thus, Reed (2001) defines Africana womanism as an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. In the same vein, Hudson-Hudson-Weems (2000) explicitly asserts that Africana womanism is a paradigm designed for all women of African descent. It should be noted that “African descent” includes all African women across the globe, not only those residing in the African continent. Africana womanism therefore can be seen as ideology that addresses those issues affecting African woman throughout the world, regardless of whether they are in Africa or outside. For this reason, I adopt this ideology since it speaks to my study: I am interested in analyzing “the Africana woman’s existence” (Reed, 2001, p. 168).

Hudson-Weems (2000) identifies components which define Africana womanism. I will discuss a few in an effort to justify why the ideology is deemed relevant for this study. Africana womanism advocates for sisterhood which is much needed for survival of women in a male dominated society (Hudson-Weems, 2001). Worth noting is that Basotho women, likewise support one another in bad and good times. Evidence from the songs analyzed indicates that when they encounter problems, Basotho women seek counsel from other women. Another component is commitment to family (Hudson-Weems, 2001). This is of great value to Basotho society as the family is the foundation of all sectors within the nation. Women play a great role in nurturing their children and holding their families strong. This is reflected in some of the proverbs which give women power to uphold their dignity and fight for the survival of their families regardless of hard it may be. One example is the proverb “*mosadi o tshwara thipa ka bohaleng*” (a woman holds a knife at the sharp end). It is important to note that this study has no

intentions of analyzing proverbs, but they are used here to justify the relevance of using African womanism as a theoretical base for the current study. It can be argued that Basotho women put their families first at all times.

Like all other types of indigenous feminism, African womanism pursues a social justice agenda as it advocates for the empowerment of women who are trapped in patriarchal systems, (Reed, 2001). Worth noting is that Nkealah (2016) echoes the same sentiments that African women's experiences must be scrutinized from Afrocentric perspectives. I feel strongly about this conceptual framework as it is grounded in African culture, which for this study is of great importance since it unravels how Basotho women use *ditolobonya* songs, therefore taking a more culturally and historically sensitive position (Reed, 2001, & Hudson-Weems, 2001). Personally, I am of the mindset that Africana womanism is deemed relevant for this study as the focus is looking at the cultural circumstances of Basotho women in their marriages. Likewise, Nkealah (2016) agrees that indigenous feminist thoughts are "theorized on indigenous models, which means the theories take a look into their histories and cultures to draw from appropriate tools for empowering women and enlighten men" (p. 63). It is important to note that Africana womanism is family centered: this is of great value to the current study since Basotho women, like other African societies, consider family life of great importance. Evidence shows that they gather in *pitiki* celebrations, welcoming the new child and rejoicing together with the new mother. For this reason, in an attempt to understand the meanings attached to *ditolobonya* songs, I must consider the cultural circumstances surrounding their womanhood, since their experiences are at the centre of it all. Having established the theoretical lenses through which I see this study, I define what *ditolobonya* and *pitiki* are in the following section.

### **Ditolobonya Songs**

*Ditolobonya* is a kind of cultural Basotho music, performed by women and girls. According to Soai (2019) *ditolobonya* is a music genre which comes in the form of a song and dance performed exclusively by women and girls. Soai (2019) further articulates that the *ditolobonya* version of women is highly secretive and was performed as *pitiki* "the celebration that follows the birth of a child in places where these songs were preformed, men were not allowed." I wish to bring to the attention of the reader that initially, *ditolobonya* was played by married women or those unmarried women who have given birth. Jayaraman (2014) concurs that only married women and mothers can attend the concerts in the village. It is important to note that young girls are taught the dance because women believe that they have to learn how to move their hips at a very tender age. One of the objectives of the play was to equip Basotho women with skills to satisfy their husbands sexually. Perhaps the other reason was that since women seem to encounter similar problems in their marriages, they would understand one another when one seeks counsel from other women on how to deal with her daily experiences, one being a cheating husband among others. In Basotho culture, when a woman gets married, she is instructed on how to manage her marital affairs. In her study, Rapeane (2003) indicates that the bride goes through a process called "*ho lauwa* (to be instructed in marital affairs)" p.103. Another scholar who dwelled on this topic is Thetela (2002) who defines *ho laya* as practice that is used in policing of girls' bodies in an effort to teach them the essence of Sesotho morality. For this reason, the married woman is further instructed not to "air her dirty laundry in public" by sharing her private marriage matters to friends. It is through platforms like *ditolobonya* that women share the problems they encounter in their marriages hence those who were not married were not allowed entry as the believe was that they had no experience in marriage life and could not advise married women, or even worse they would judge them.

Only recently, unmarried women, who are single and have children, are allowed in such gatherings. Therefore, it is not only married who get advice on how to sexually please their husbands, even those unmarried women receive this information as well. Perhaps this change in attitude came as a result of change in the way *ditolobonya* is perceived recently. I want to extend this argument by indicating that Soai (2019) observes that there was a decline in *ditolobonya* music in the 1980's and 1990's in response to growth in Christianity and people regarded tradition as "Pagan". It is worth arguing that despite the fact that many of the cultural practices are no longer followed to the letter, evidence shows that remnants of these customs are still respected and defended as

commonsense values by both men and women, (Thetela, 2002). However, it should be noted that as much as other musical genres have become extinct over the years, *ditolobonya* has endured (Soai, 2019).

According to (Soai, 2019) *ditolobonya* is considered as an instrument for many trivial situations for women which include among others:

- A possible remedy to social ills
- A powerful platform for women to address their marital problems
- A valuable support network

*Ditolobonya* songs are emancipatory by nature. They give Basotho women a platform, “to tell about being a woman, to describe a reality from a woman’s view, a woman’s perspective, and (Kwatsha, 2002, p. 66). Having established what *ditolobonya* songs are and the role they play in Basotho women’s life, in what follows, I discuss *pitiki*.

### **PITIKI**

*Pitiki* is a ceremonial feast which marks the end of a new mother’s period of confinement. It usually takes place between two to three months after a child is born and it is exclusively for women. The main reason for this feast is to thank the women who have been supportive to the new mother and also to introduce the new born baby to the society. In celebrating this milestone, men are not allowed entry because “*pitiki* dance is off-limits to men” Coplan (1971:166). Furthermore, Coplan (1971) holds the opinion that only women attend this ceremony because Sesotho designates reproduction as an exclusively female domain, and customs that emphasize their responsibility are identified by the absence of men.

For centuries, women have formed relationships with other women as a form of support systems. It is in these relationships that they discuss the hardships they endure on a daily basis. According to Kwatsha (2002, p. 59) “women friendships are one of the healing relationships among women, especially for those who have problems in their lives.” Likewise, Basotho women come together through celebrations of *pitiki*, in order to give support, to talk about their experiences and get advice on how to tackle problems, especially those related to their marriages or relationships with men. “By sharing their experiences, they are showing sisterhood to each other. As they discover these experiences, one will discover that she is not the only one who has such hiccups in life,” (Kwatsha, 2002, p. 59). The preceding two sections have clearly defined what *ditolobonya* song and *pitiki* are; the following section will therefore discuss related studies and identify the gap that this study intends to fill.

### **Related Studies**

Similar studies have been conducted by different scholars, (Rapeane, 2003, Molapo, 2005, Thetela, 2005, Khotso, 2019, & Rapeane-Mathonsi, 2011). In what follows I will discuss what these scholars researched on and how their studies are relevant for the current research study.

A study on the relationship between language and gender was conducted by Rapeane (2003). In this study, the researcher shows how Basotho men and women differ in their use of language, as well as the factors that contribute to this difference. Rapeane (2003, p. 2) postulates “the structure of Southern Sotho has gender denoting aspects.” It is important to note that in this study, Rapeane further researcher notes that Basotho men dominate many aspects of the language. As a result, this study is relevant for the current paper as it shows how patriarchal structures within Basotho language practices, reflect on the oppression of women through language use. Like the present study, Rapeane’s study is framed through feminism lenses. Data was collected through the use of informal conversations with the informants, interviews and analysis of written documents like Sesotho books. However, the study is different from the current research paper as it focuses on the use of language by Basotho men and women while the focus of the present research study is on the analysis of selected *ditolobonya* songs. Furthermore, the study is different from the current paper in that it makes analysis of language use

between the two genders while the current research study makes an analysis of ditlobonya songs to show how Basotho women portray their daily experiences.

Rapeane-Mathonsi (2011) conducted a similar study on the analysis of ditlobonya songs. Her study focuses on the songs that illustrate animosity among women. She chooses those songs that illustrate 'bitter wars' between mothers-in-law and their daughters-in-law. Furthermore, her focus is on those songs sung by mistresses, sending a message to their lovers' wives. The husband's affair escalates to "the irresponsibility that is proved by the man who now spends his nights with the mistress results in the mistress's arrogance," (Rapeane-Mathonsi, 2011, p. 81). The researcher notes that this may result in the mistress wanting her relationship to go public whereas it was supposed to be a secret since in Basotho culture "married people should refrain from extra-marital affairs," (Rapeane-Mathonsi, 2011, p. 2). However, it should be noted that the mistress wanting to be known may be a strategy she uses to frustrate the wife with the hope that one day she could replace the wife and get married to the man. This study is important for the current paper as like my research study, it makes a detailed analysis of ditlobonya songs. However, it focuses only on those songs that talk about relationships among women while the current study focuses on those songs that show different experiences of married women, going beyond those relationships. The current study therefore fills this gap by including factors such as challenges of those women who happen to enter into extra-marital affairs and seeking counsel from fellow women. Through her study, Rapeane-Mathonsi illustrates how daughters-in-law suffer in the hands of their in-laws especially the mothers.

Thetela (2002) conducted a study on sex discourses and gender constructions in Southern Sotho. In her study, Thetela focuses on how victims of rape or sexual assault text and talk about sex. The study reveals that Basotho women have been socialized using a linguistic code of *hlonipha* (respect). The findings of the study suggest that 'the unequal access to the sex discourses illustrated by the *hlonipha* constraints on women's discourse during police interviews functions as a discursive strategy for constructing and maintaining patriarchal hegemony in the social legal system,' (Thetela, 2002, p. 177). The study is relevant for the current research paper as it illustrates how Basotho women are disadvantaged by the patriarchal hegemony. As Mosetse (2006) remarks, "power relations are portrayed and kept through the use of customs, traditions and history to guarantee rigidly that is unlikely to be disrupted," (p.73). However, Thetela's study is different from the above study as it illustrates how Basotho women use ditlobonya songs to empower themselves and other women to disrupt the very same patriarchal structures oppressing them. The current study goes further to show how through *ditlobonya* songs, Basotho women form support structures to advise one another on better ways to cope in their marriages and relationships.

In her study on women in patriarchy in Lesotho, Molapo (2005) observes that certain Basotho practices and gender roles contribute to the abuse and violence of Basotho women. Women are raised as fragile while men are moulded to be strong and discouraged to express their feelings. This is reflected in different proverbs such as '*monna ke nku ha a lle*,' meaning a man is a sheep, he does not cry. Molapo (2005) therefore notes that this is one of the contributing factors of abuse of women through abduction marriage. For this reason, this introduces violence against women as an accepted norm. From her study, Molapo (2005) addresses exercise of masculine domination through marriage. Molapo observes that for years, women have been victims of gender ideology. For this reason, patriarchy rules have shown how women are expected to behave or how they have to endure abuse in their marriages. This study falls short in addressing how Basotho women respond to masculinity through the use of ditlobonya songs as a weapon for them to survive in gendered society. Again, Molapo's study is unraveled in the masculinity perspective while the present study employs feminist and content analysis approaches.

Khotso (2019) conducted a study on the link between masculinity and HIV among Basotho. In her study, Khotso shows that there is a link between the meanings attached to new meanings of Basotho proverbs and the spread of AIDS as well as "new infections among masculinities" (p. 210). The researcher further indicates that the use of masculine language impacts on the spread of HIV infections among Basotho. In this study, Khotso (2019) says that men make use of Sesotho proverbs that support their masculine ideologies such as having multiple sex partners,

practicing unsafe sex thus putting their partners and themselves at risk. Further still, Khotso (2019) notes that Basotho men, further make use of proverbs in supporting their actions of engaging in extra marital affairs like *monna ke qati wa lomisanwa* (a man is a tripe, he is eaten by many people. As a result, they shield behind proverbs that promote their promiscuous behavior. Khotso (2019) further holds the opinion that men have authority in relationships on whether to have safe or unsafe sex. For this reason, “women who engage in sexual relationships with this man whether officially married or in the extra marital affair are forced to accept to “share” the love of this man” (p. 205)

In introspect; Khotso’s study focuses on how Basotho men make use of proverbs to promote masculinity and how they justify their promiscuous behaviour in having multiple sex partners, to justify their choice not practice safe sex, to have sexual relationships with teenage girls as well as to justify their brutal behaviour such as rape. This does not say anything about how these women who find themselves entangled in these relationships resist this masculine dominance. For this reason, the current study addresses this gap by investigating how Basotho women who have been exposed to such problems in their marriages and relationships use *ditolobonya* songs as a platform to empower themselves and other women in similar situations. Once more, Khotso’s study employs a cathexis masculinity framework while my study is premised on the lenses of African feminism. Further, Khotso’s study employs content semantic shift in understanding contemporary idioms and proverbs while my study employs content analysis in understanding the meaning of *ditolobonya* songs. The section that follows features methodology.

## Methodology

To collect data, I listened to purposely selected *ditolobonya* songs. I also attended different Pitiki gatherings where I listened carefully to the songs as cellphone use is prohibited in such platforms, especially recordings. For this reason, I could not record the songs in such ceremonies, the only best thing I could do was to transcribe the songs while writing. This means, I always had a journal with me, which was also used to reflect on the feelings I got in listening to such songs. The focus of this paper is on understanding the underlying meanings of *ditolobonya* songs. Therefore, I am interested in understanding how women portray their experiences through *ditolobonya* songs.

This paper makes use of content analysis to make meaning of the selected *ditolobonya* songs. The main rational for using content analysis is that, through it, I was able to listen to the lyrics of the songs and transcribed them. It is important to note that *ditolobonya* songs address different issues ranging from expression of love, appreciation of a partner, boasting about one’s children as well as expressing painful experiences amongst others. However, in this study, my interest is on those songs that express the painful experiences and realities of Basotho women in their marriages. For this reason, I purposely selected *ditolobonya* songs relevant to my objectives. As Laldas (2008) articulates, content analysis is deemed relevant for this paper since it allowed me to identify themes and develop categories in an effort to analyze data. Khotso (2019) used content analysis to analyze Sesotho proverbs which denote masculinity and she justifies “some of the idioms and proverbs that this study is interested in can be found in music. Therefore, content analysis was relevant,” (p. 204). Furthermore, content analysis is deemed relevant for this paper as the focus of the material to be analyzed is understood as embedded in its context of communication, the socio-cultural background of the speaker, in this case the singer, and also who the target group is. In this context, the songs are sung by Basotho women, in an effort to portray their daily experiences and the recipient being other women.

I purposely selected the songs which are centered on lamentations of women about their daily life problems as they navigate the institution of marriage. While listening to these songs, it came to my mind that this is one way in which Basotho women resist gender injustices and patriarchal dominations. This provoked me to critically listen to them and pose some questions which helped me to embark on this study. It is envisaged that the findings of this study will educate men about better ways to handle women, and see them as their equals rather than

subordinates. This paper further aims to empower women and encourage them to challenge the status quo. In what follows, an analysis of the selected songs will follow.

## Ditoloboya Songs for Analysis

### Song 1

<i>Wena molamo wa ka o phepheletsane</i>	You my sister-in-law, you are an intermeddle
<i>Nna molamo wa ka, ke phepheletsane</i>	My sister-in-law is an intermeddler
<i>Ke re molamo wa ka ke phepheletsane</i>	I am saying my sister-in-law is an intermeddler
<i>O nqabantse le monna wa ka</i>	She stirred trouble between me and my husband
<i>Wa nqabanya le matsale wa ka.</i>	She stirred trouble between me and my mother-in-law
<i>Aheee wena molamo waka o phepheletsane</i>	Aheee you my sister-in-law you are an intermeddler
<i>Ako shebane le taba tsa hao phepheletsane</i>	Please mind your business you intermeddler
<i>Heee wena molamo waka phepheletsane</i>	Hey you my sister-in-law you are an intermeddler

In this song, the singer is fed up with her sister-in-law who always meddles in her affairs. She indicates that she is always involved in her affairs and now she has stirred trouble between her husband and her mother-in-law. She is begging the sister-in-law to mind her own business and focus on her own affairs. In most African societies, the bride does not usually get along with the in-laws, especially mothers-in-law and at times sisters-in-law. Rapeane (2003) agrees that in Sesotho, as in many African cultures, mothers-in-law are notorious for ill-treating their daughters-in-law. Rapeane further asserts that at times the mothers-in-law take their sons' sides in times of disagreement, especially if the family does not support their daughter-in-law. As such, in this song the bride talks to her sister-in-law, lamenting that she has brought animosity between her and her husband, as well as her mother-in-law. In her study, Rapeane-Mathonsi (2011) indicates that the songs of this nature are sung to communicate the pain that married women suffer at the hands of other women. In the same vein, Mosetse (2005) is of the opinion that many African societies experience woman to woman discrimination or gerontocracy which is characterized by the discrimination of daughters-in-law who do not fit into mothers-in-law's expectations and requirements. The following song, echoes similar sentiments as it also shows how women at times show dislike towards one another.

### SONG 2

<i>Basadi le ntlhoile keng, ha kea nka banna ba lona.</i>	Women why do you hate me so much
<i>Ke inketse lebolotsana,</i>	I found myself a young man
<i>Ntlohelleng basadi wee, ntlohelleng kakopo.</i>	Women please leave me alone

What this song implies is that women seem to ridicule other women when they have an affair with married. Rapeane-Mathonsi (2011) seems to agree that at times some women get involved with married men with the hope of replacing the wife one day. In her study, Rapeane exemplifies how some mistresses "boast to the wife because of the comfort they enjoy, while the wife and children suffer," (Rapeane-Mathonsi, 2011, p. 81). Often than not, this is experienced by single or unmarried women. When they get involved with married men, they are labelled home wreckers and hated for that. This is because in Basotho culture, "the mistress is usually non-existent except to her lover because society ignores her as a punishment for her unacceptable behavior," (Rapeane-Mathonsi, 2011, p. 82). Recently, to avoid being labeled as home-wreckers and as an effort to find a sense of belonging, women have resorted to having affairs with younger men and boys. This is evident from this song as the woman indicates that she is not in love with a married man, she found herself '*lebolotsana*' (a younger man). She tells these women to leave her alone since she did not steal anyone's husband. In the next song, a married woman is lamenting for her husband to come home.

### Song 3 Tloho hae

<i>Tloho hae, se robale malapeng,</i>	Come home and don't sleep in other people's houses
<i>Monn'a nketsang,</i>	A man who does me (the man I sleep with)
<i>Tloho hae se robale malapeng,</i>	Come home, don't sleep in people's homes
<i>Ntat'a bana ba ka,</i>	The father of my children,
<i>Se robale malapeng tloho hae se robale,</i>	Do not sleep in other people's houses
<i>Tloho hae, se robale malapeng,</i>	Come home and don't sleep in other people's houses)

In this song, the woman is lamenting the absence of her husband who does not sleep at home. Instead of complaining that her husband does not come, she pleads with him to come home and stop sleeping in other people's homes. I use evidence from the words of this song to illustrate that even when they are not satisfied, Basotho women cannot express their feelings explicitly. This is a result of the way they have been socialized from an early age to use *hlonipha* (respect) language. For me, they respect their husbands even when it is unnecessary. In her study, Thetela (2002) observes that when a woman gets married, she goes through the process of *ho lauwu* as indicated earlier. It should be noted that Rapeane (2003) echoes the same sentiments. In her study she shows how Basotho women are told not to question their husbands' whereabouts. Worth noting is that a woman cannot do the same, she is expected to explain her whereabouts, or even get permission from her husband to go somewhere. In her study, Khotso (2017, p. 21) echoes the same sentiments "women lament for their position in the society which is equal to that of children in the family, whereby among others she cannot question her husband why he comes home late in the night or arrives in the morning."

Again, in this song, the woman refers to her husband as '*monna ya nketsang*' (literally the man who 'does me', meaning the man I have sex with). Because sex is a taboo in Basotho nation, women cannot go about talking about their sexual experiences or even the words associated with sex explicitly. Thetela (2002) states, "among the Southern Sotho, sex is regarded as a very private matter, and thus it is a taboo subject for public discussion, particularly for women" (p. 180). In the same vein, Possa-Mogoera (2018) indicates that anything that is taboo prescribes that a person is forbidden to do or say certain things. This is a result of cultural belief systems which at times a valid reason is not even given or worse, never known. Possa-Mogoera (2018) further argues that tabooic expressions as hidden through proverbs, promote rape culture and discrimination of women. As such "public talks about sex by women often characterizes forms of anti-social behaviour such as slander, insults and swear words, which Basotho women are expected to refrain from," (Thetela, 2002, p. 180). To expand on this trend, in her study on language differentiation based on gender in Southern Sotho, Rapeane (2003) indicates that unlike men, women cannot boast about sexual experiences or encounter, as much as men, rather, they "can have both crude and euphemistic forms at their disposal" (p.85). Rapeane further extends this argument by indication that this does not only apply in men and women since boys and girls are socialized in different ways and notes the following:

- Reprimanding girls for behavior that would be condoned for boys is normal in Sotho culture
- Boys are allowed to use language with more liberty than girls
- Sotho girls use language to reinforce feelings of solidarity and sisterhood, while boys tend to bolster their authority over others with language (p. 85-88).

### SONG 4: Ka Ila joo!

<i>Ka Ila joo!</i>	I cried
<i>Ka Ila, ka Ila bosiu ba sa,</i>	I cried the whole night
<i>Ho se na mme, ho se na ntate,</i>	In the absence of my mother and my father
<i>Ka Ila joo! bosiu basa.</i>	I cried the whole night

In this song, the woman is crying, because the mother-in-law is ill-treating her. The mother-in-law takes all the money sent by her husband who is not around, working far away from home. When the husband sends money



home, the mother-in-law receives it and the wife is dependent on her financially. The same view is echoed by Molapo (2005), who found out that some respondents in her study indicated that they had similar experiences. She indicated that most of the female respondents of her study complained about ill-treatment by their mothers-in-law. She articulates "it quite happens that in these situations that the mother-in-law will claim all the money that the husband sends which results in the wife's complete dependence on her mother-in-law" (p. 98). Conversely, Rapeane-Mathonsi (2011) is in agreement with Molapo as she concurs "the relationship between the mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law is generally that of conflict perpetuated by jealousy, competition, poverty, the fight for independence and many other factors" (p. 77). Like Molapo, Rapeane-Mathonsi (2011) further illustrates how financial issues further deteriorate the relationship between these two parties. As noted in this song, the mother-in-law wants to be in control of the finances and the woman does not have a say in this matter. Rapeane-Mathonsi (2011, p. 80) supports "in some families even the buying of basic needs such as groceries and furniture may result in gossip about a married man because some mothers-in-law want to control every aspect of their sons' families even the use of money." From the foregoing arguments, it can be concluded that most married women suffer in the hands of their mothers-in-law who want to take over and control finances of their sons' families, therefore ignoring the daughter-in-law as entitled to ownership and control of her own family affairs. This usually happens in cases where a woman is financially dependent on the husband because she does not have a job and also stays with the in-laws. This therefore is "a testimony to the existence of bitter wars between married women and their female in-laws..." (Rapeane-Mathonsi, 2011, p.76). The following song illustrates how women often resort to seeking counsel from other women in tough times.

#### SONG 5: Nkeletseng lona basadi

<i>Nkeletseng hle, lona basadi,</i>	please advise me women
<i>Nkeletseng hle, lona basadi</i> ,	please advise me you women
<i>Ke qabantse bana ba motho,</i>	I have paired siblings
<i>E moholo le e monyane,</i>	the young one and the old
<i>Sapoto tsa bona, di a lekana hee,</i>	their support is equal
<i>He sapoto tsa bona di a lekana.</i>	Their support is equal

In this song, the woman is in love with two brothers. For this reason, she is seeking counsel from other women on what to do in this dilemma. She indicates that she has to support both of them equally (that is please them both sexually). Culturally, in Sesotho, a woman who has multiple partners is frowned upon and considered *letekatse* (a whore). Like most African societies, one other characteristic visible in Basotho nation is the issue of silence as a communicative device for women. Rapeane (2003) asserts that female silence is a device forced upon women by male oppression. Conversely, Molapo (2005) points out that apart from silence, as indicated earlier, whenever Basotho woman encounter problems, they call upon help and seek counsel from others. This is articulated by Soai (2019) who asserts that through ditlobonya songs, Basotho women not only celebrate the company of other women, they also come together to talk share their problems and advise one another when there is a need.

#### Conclusion

This paper focused on themes inherent in *ditlobonya* songs to portray daily struggles of Basotho women in their relationships and marriages. The findings of the study indicate that through *ditlobonya* songs, Basotho women come together in an effort to talk about the challenges they encounter in their marriages and advise one another. *Ditlobonya* songs analyzed in this study therefore have themes around the relationship between daughters-in-law and their female in-laws. One other theme inherent in the themes identified in the current study is the use of euphemistic language by Basotho women when talking about sex which is regarded as taboo. This is also an influence of the way they have been socialized from an early age as their culture has patriarchal ideologies which restrict gives strict prescriptions on how they should carry themselves, thereby restricting them in the way they

use language. This study therefore discussed how Basotho women make use of *ditolobonya* songs to express their feelings, and protest against dominating patriarchal structures favoring men over them. I analyzed these songs through feminist lenses to show how Basotho women narrate their life experiences and realities. The findings of this study also provide the basis for further studies on how Basotho women perceive *ditolobonya* songs and what can be done to preserve them. A further research on the attitudes of Basotho women towards *ditolobonya* songs is also needed. The study also suggests that both Basotho men and women should come together in one forum to address issues inherent in these songs as through *ditolobonya* songs, the message focuses only on women while denying men an opportunity to take part in this fight against patriarchal structures.

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